DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 386 515 UD 030 581

AUTHOR	Schwartz, Wendy
TITLE	School Dropouts: New Information about an Old Problem. ERIC/CUE Digest, Number 109.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-UD-96-5; ISSN-0889-8049
PUB DATE	Aug 95
CONTRACT	RR93002016
NOTE	4p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Teachers College, Box 40, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027 (Free).
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Definitions; *Disadvantaged Youth; Dropout Rate; Dropout Research; *Dropouts; Educational Trends; Expectation; High Risk Students; High Schools; *High School Students; National Surveys; *Student Attrition; Student Characteristics; Urban Schools; *Urban Youth; Wages
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Researchers at the Policy Information Center of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) have analyzed information from the National Center for Education Statistics; data from state, city, and other sources; and results from recent surveys of high school students to present a summary of the current dropout situation. The 1995 ETS report, "Dreams Deferred: High School Dropouts in the United States," which has a special focus on urban youth, is summarized in this digest. Although calculating an accurate dropout rate is nearly impossible because of differences in counting methods and definitions and student mobility, the dropout rate appears to be declining. In 1993 about 381,000 students left school without graduating. Nearly two-thirds dropped out before the 10th grade. The dropout rate in large cities remains high, although it too has decreased slightly in recent years. With respect to lifetime wages, the gap between dropouts and more educated adults is widening steadily. Student survey responses have indicated that dropouts tend to have many characteristics in common and that they express a variety of reasons for dropping out. Most dropouts surveyed recognized that they needed further education, and they expected to acquire it, although their expectations suggested that they did not believe they were sacrificing their futures by dropping out. (Contains 7 references.) (SLD)

ED 386 515

School Dropouts:
New Information About an Old Problem

Wendy Schwartz

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

UD 030 581

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON URBAN EDUCATION

DIGEST

Number 109, August 1995 EDO-UD-96-5 ISSN 0889 8049

SCHOOL DROPOUTS: NEW INFORMATION ABOUT AN OLD PROBLEM

In the last few decades, both the personal and social cost of dropping out of school have increased. Concurrently, significant education resources have been applied to student retention efforts.

The primary source of information about dropouts is the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education, which collects statistics and conducts longitudinal studies. To present a picture of the current dropout situation, researchers at the Policy Information Center of the Educational Testing Service (ETS) have analyzed NCES information, data from state, city, and other sources, and results of surveys of recent high school students. The ETS report, *Dreams Deferred: High School Dropouts in the United States*, with a special focus on urban youth, is summarized in this digest.

The Dropout Population

The Dropout Rate

Overall. Calculating an accurate dropout rate is nearly impossible, since some students return to school, and schools differ in their definitions and counting methods. Nevertheless, the dropout rate appears to be declining, although about 381,000 students left school without graduating in 1993. Nearly two-thirds of the dropouts leave before the tenth grade, 20 percent drop out by the eighth grade, and 3 percent do not even complete the fourth grade.

Ethnic Differences. Hispanic students are slightly more likely to drop out than African Americans; Asian American and white students are less likely than both those groups. Nearly 40 percent of Hispanic students who drop out do so before the eighth grade.

The Urban Rate. The dropout rate in large urban districts remains high, although it has decreased slightly in the last few years. In some districts it is double the national average, and in 1992-93 one out of four districts had a four-year dropout rate greater than 35 percent. Also, as opposed to the national trend, the rate for African American and Hispanic students is increasing in some urban areas.

High School Equivalency Candidates. Each year, however, nearly half a million people get a high school equivalency General Educational Development (GED) certificate. In 1993 the 450,000 people who passed the GED tests accounted for one-seventh of the population receiving a diploma. The average age of GED candidates was 26 in that year, and more than 60 percent of them planned to continue their schooling after receiving a certificate.

UD030581

Income and Earnings Potential

In 1992 dropouts earned slightly under $13,000 on average, about one-third less than high school graduates.

With respect to lifetime wages, the gap between dropouts and more educated adults is widening steadily as opportunities expand for higher skilled workers and disappear for the less skilled. For example, it is estimated that, overall, the 1993 dropout pool will earn $212,000 less than high school graduates, and $812,000 less than college graduates. Further, in the last 20 years, the earnings level for dropouts doubled while it nearly tripled for college graduates, a trend that is likely to intensify in the future.

Dropouts comprise nearly half of the heads of households on welfare, and a similar percentage of the prison population.

Characteristics

Using data from surveys covering four years in the lives of students who began high school in 1988 (the National Educational Longitudinal Study, NELS:88, Second Follow-Up), ETS identified characteristics common to many dropouts based on the youth's responses:

Marital Status and Parenthood. In 1992, about one-fifth of the dropouts (approximate age 18) were married, living as married, or divorced, with females more likely than males to be married. Nearly 40 percent had a child or were expecting one. Nearly one-third of the females who dropped out cited pregnancy as the reason. Interestingly, some youth said they dropped out because they wanted to have a family: 12 percent of the females and six percent of the males.

School and Home Stability. More than half the dropouts moved during the four-year study period, compared with 15 percent of the graduates. Nearly a quarter of the dropouts changed schools two or more times. Twice as many dropouts as graduates ran away from home: twelve and six percent.

School Experiences. A large majority of dropouts were enrolled in a general high school program, with very few in a college preparatory program. Almost one-fifth were held back a grade, and almost half failed a course. They were also more likely than the persisters to have been enrolled in special education or alternative programs. Dropouts reported the following information about personal behavior during their last two years in school:

- Almost one-half missed at least 10 days of school.
- One-third cut class at least 10 times.
- One-quarter were late at least 10 times.
- One-third were put on in-school suspension, suspended, or put on probation.
- Six percent were transferred to another school for disciplinary reasons.
- Eleven percent were arrested.
- Eight percent spent time in a juvenile home or shelter.

Attitudes and Expectations. Dropouts tended to believe that they don't have control over their lives, that chance and luck are important, and that something always seemed to stop them from getting ahead. Conversely, graduates felt that they had a great deal of control over their lives, a belief known to promote educational achievement.

Dropouts did not differ significantly from graduates in their sense of self-concept, with both expressing some negative personal feelings. Nearly one-half felt "useless at times," one-third thought they were "no good at all," and nearly one-quarter "didn't have much to be proud of."

Despite leaving school, 85 percent of the dropouts planned to attain at least a high school education. About one-fifth expected to attend a career education school; a third expected to attend college, with 11 percent looking forward to getting a degree; and five percent expected to get a master's degree.

Reasons for Dropping Out

As reported, usually a variety of school problems and personal factors combined to cause a student to drop out. Dropouts cited the following reasons most frequently:

School Factors

- Didn't like school in general or a particular transfer school.
- Was failing, getting poor grades, or couldn't keep up with school work. (Only 18 percent reported having passed their last year of school.)
- Didn't get along with teachers and/or students.
- Had disciplinary problems, was suspended, or expelled
- Didn't fit in.
- Didn't feel safe.

Personal Factors

- Got a job, had a family to support, or had trouble managing both school and work.
- Got married, got pregnant (one-third were pregnant when they left), became a parent, wanted to have a family, or had a family to take care of.
- Had friends who dropped out.
- Wanted to travel.
- Had a drug or alcohol problem.

Interventions

Schools

The most frequent intervention by school personnel was trying to talk a student into staying, but even this effort was cited by only 39 percent of dropouts surveyed. However, since the dropouts' responses about interventions were based on a question about what happened "the last time" they stopped attending school, they may not have thought they should include earlier interventions. Further, the youth may not have even realized that some long-term interventions, such as remedial education, were actually dropout prevention measures. Among the concrete offers made to potential dropouts were these:

- Help with making up missed work, tutoring, and/or placement in a special program.
- Transfer to another school.
- Help with personal problems.
- Calls or visits home.

Some schools indicated that they would permit a student to return if he or she got good grades, followed rules, or promised better attendance. Conversely, 17 percent of the potential dropouts reported being told that they couldn't come back to school, and 16 percent were expelled or suspended.

Families

Dropouts reported that parents and guardians were more opposed to their decision than were school personnel, with three-quarters indicating that their families had tried to talk them out of leaving school. However, a majority were also told that the decision was theirs. Among the offers made by families to encourage persistence were these:

- Help with personal problems.
- Counseling.
- Help with making up school work.
- Arranging for tutoring, a school transfer, and/or placement in a special program.

About 20 percent of parents and guardians, particularly those with sons at risk of dropping out, also contacted principals, teachers, and counselors. The youth reported that an equal percentage of caregivers said that it was all right to leave, while 12 percent punished the dropout.

Conclusion

Despite leaving school, most dropouts recognized that they needed further education and expected to acquire it. Indeed, eight percent of the youth surveyed already had obtained a GED certificate. Further, the career aspirations of many dropouts were high, although they were currently holding low-skill, low-paying, and possibly dead-end jobs. Such optimism suggests that they did not believe they were sacrificing their futures by dropping out.

Since completing a high school education without interruption is the best foundation for realizing the dreams of youth, it is crucial that both educators and families find ways to make it possible for all students—the pregnant and parenting, the ones who need to hold jobs, the failing, and even the most problematic student—to stay in school.

— Wendy Schwartz

Source

Coley, R. J. (1995). *Dreams deferred: High school dropouts in the United States.* Princeton: Educational Testing Service, Policy Information Center.

Databases

Baldwin, J. (1994). *Who took the GED? GED 1993 statistical report.* Washington, DC: American Council on Education, Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials.

Council of Great City Schools. (1994, September). *National urban education goals: 1992-93 indicators report.* Washington, DC: Author. (ED 376 267)

Ekstrom, R. B., Goertz, M. E., Pollack, J. M., & Rock, D. A. (1987). Who drops out of school and why? Findings from a national study. In G. Natriello (Ed.), *School dropouts: Patterns and policies.* New York: Teachers College Press. (ED 291 811)

Ingels, S. J. (1994, October). *Second follow-up: Dropout component data file user's manual, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Research and Improvement.

Ingels, S. J. (1994, October). *Second follow-up: Student component data file user's manual, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Research and Improvement.

McMillen, M. M., Kaufman, P., & Whitener, S. D. (1994, September). *Dropout rates in the United States: 1993.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Research and Improvement. (ED 375 222)

Snyder, T. D. (Ed.). (1993, January). *120 years of American education: A statistical portrait.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. (ED 355 277)

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Institute for Urban and Minority Education, Box 40, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, (800) 601-4868. Erwin Flaxman, Director. Wendy Schwartz, Managing Editor.

This Digest was developed by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract. no. RR93002016. The opinions in this Digest do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE